

VEHICLE AIR BAG MINIMUM DISTANCE ENFORCEMENT APPARATUS, METHOD AND SYSTEM

RELATED APPLICATION INFORMATION

This application is a continuation of and claims the benefit of and priority to U.S.
 Patent Application Serial No. 09/897,536, which is a continuation of and claims the benefit of
 and priority to U.S. Patent Application No. 09/220,832, filed December 24, 1998, which
 issued as U.S. Patent No. 6,293,584 on September 25, 2001 and which claims the benefit of
 and priority to U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/101,487, filed September 23, 1998; U.S.
 Provisional Application No. 60/105,245, filed October 22, 1998; and U.S. Provisional
 Application No. 60/105,595, filed October 26, 1998.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to safety systems and methods for vehicles and more
 particularly relates to vehicle air-bag systems which, in operation, take into account a
 clearance between a vehicle passenger and an air-bag.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Although statistics may indicate that vehicles equipped with air-bags have enhanced
 passenger safety, under certain conditions air-bags may have been identified as a source of
 passenger injuries and may have even been cited in some cases as causing death. As
 understood, deaths may have been attributed to air-bags predominantly in low-speed
 accidents, and air-bags may have also been a factor in deaths resulting from high-speed
 accidents.

A number of these injuries may have involved shorter drivers (more specifically,
 drivers 5' 0" or less in height) who adjust the seat position so that a distance between the air-
 bag and the driver are reduced below a safe clearance. Drivers taller than 5'0" may also
 position themselves within the minimum safe clearance and this positioning is dangerous
 regardless of the height of the driver. In certain systems, as all of the adjustment for drivers
 of various sizes is generally done through seat movement, shorter drivers may be positioned
 much closer to the steering wheel (and the air-bag contained therein) than are taller drivers.

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